

Leatherwood Station Covered Bridge
Spanning Leatherwood Creek
Montezuma
Parke County
Indiana

HAER No. IN-40

HAER
IND,
66-MONT,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN AND HISTORICAL DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

LEATHERWOOD STATION COVERED BRIDGE

HAER
IND
61-MONT
1-

Location: Spanning Leatherwood Creek in Parke County, Indiana; 3.78 miles ENE of Montezuma, Indiana
T.16N. R.8W., S.21, SE 1/4, NW 1/4, SE 1/4. Quad: Montezuma, Ind.

Date of Construction: 1899. Repaired in 1940 with intermittent, cosmetic repairs being made since late 1950's.

Present Owner: Parke County Commissioners
Parke County Courthouse
Rockville, Indiana 47872

Present Use: Closed to all traffic since August, 1979.

Significance: None, other than it being a covered, wooden bridge

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The Leatherwood Station Covered Bridge crosses Leatherwood Creek on West Union Road in the west central portion of Parke County, Indiana. The bridge is located 3.78 miles ENE of the town of Montezuma and approximately 4.17 miles NW of the county seat, Rockville. It was built in 1899 by Joseph Albert Britton. (1)

The bridge is a Burr Arch truss. This truss is, in essence, a Multiple Kingpost truss with a wooden arch, patented by Theodore Burr of Pennsylvania in the early nineteenth century. (2) The bridge has a length of 72 feet, a width of 16 feet, with a 9-foot overhang on each end. Its opening height is 14 feet (3) and the entire structure rests on cut limestone abutments.

In March of 1898, the Parke County Commissioners decided to build a wooden covered bridge over Leatherwood Creek on the "Rockville-to-Newport Road". (4) (Newport is the county seat of neighboring Vermillion County.) On April 7, 1899, G. Butcher, the property owner at the proposed site (5) "release[d] and dedicate[d], for the use of the Public, sufficient earth and dirt for the purpose of building an approach to new bridge to be built at Leatherwood Station across Leatherwood Creek". (6) On April 9, O.P. Brown donated, "for the purpose of building the abutments"... "sufficient stone in the quarry on [his] farm". (7) On that same day, the Board of Commissioners authorized the Auditor to "advertise and give due and legal notice of the intention of said Board to let the contract for the construction of"... "one 50 foot span across Leatherwood Creek at the crossing of the Rockville and Newport highway". (7) On July 6, 1899, the contract was let to Joseph A. Britton "for building a bridge across Leatherwood Creek for the sum of \$900.00". (8) It was also "ordered that DeWitt and Reynolds be awarded the contract for the building of the abutments for the [bridge] for the sum of \$5.25 per cubic yard". (8)

This covered bridge received its name from the Indianapolis, Decatur and Springfield Railroad station which was located at the southeast corner of the track's crossing of the Rockville-to-Newport (West Union) Road. This later became the Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton Railroad and eventually the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Currently, it is part of the Chessie System. The depot has long since been abandoned and demolished, but in its heyday was the scene of much activity. Produce from surrounding farms was hauled here to be loaded for rail shipment to distant markets. With the advent of better roads and trucking facilities, farm products were hauled directly to city markets, thus removing the need for many stations such as this one. Much of the output of the now defunct Marion Brickworks, in nearby Klondyke, was loaded at this station. An interview with a nearby elderly resident, Mr. Ralph Farlow, (9) revealed that the station was a "flag" station. That is, the train would not stop to pick up freight unless a flag was set out that the engineer could see upon his approach. Indeed, Mr. Farlow's wife's grandfather, Nathan Cox, ran the flag station for a short while.

The Leatherwood Station Bridge is one of 35 surviving covered bridges in Parke County, which originally had as many as 57 covered bridges built within its boundaries. (1) At least 35 (10) and as many as

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48 of these structures were Burr Arch trusses. Of the 35 surviving covered bridges, all but one are of the Burr Arch construction. In addition, of the ten truss types utilized for Indiana's wooden covered bridges, 63% were Burr Arch trusses. (1) This truss was popular because it was the type preferred by the three principal bridge-building families in Indiana --- the Kennedys, the Brittons and J.J. Daniels. (10)

J.A. Britton was born in 1839 three miles east of Rockville. (11) He built some 40 bridges in three counties within a 33 year period, (Parke, Putnam and Vermillion) although a second source (1) has records for only 23 bridges in two counties; Parke and Putnam. The Britton family is credited with the construction of 18 covered bridges in Parke County. (12) This second source also states that he (and his sons) built his first bridge in 1882 and his last in 1920. Of either number, 17 bridges are still standing and, with the recent closure of the Leatherwood Station Bridge, 14 are still in use. Britton preferred to use the Burr Arch truss with only two exceptions. With two of his bridges, he still utilized the Multiple Kingpost truss, but simply chose not to employ the wooden arches which make the Multiple Kingpost a Burr truss. (1) He died at the age of 90 in 1929.

The history of subsequent repair efforts on the Leatherwood Station Bridge is nearly non-existent. The bridge was repaired by the W.P.A. in 1940 and it is assumed that the original wording on the portal was copied exactly. One source (4), who photographed the bridge on November 1, 1953, described it as follows: "On this date, the portal had '1899' in the center near the roof and below that, 'J.A. Britton, Build.'. Above the opening was 'Cross at a Walk'. Above the left panel [sic] and above the opening were the three 'Comrs.'; H.A. Meyers, J. Huxford and T.A. Kerr. Above the right panel [sic] was 'S.A. Pike, Aud'r, 'Wm. Rawlings, Treas.' and 'J.D. Campbell, Eng.'". In the late 1950's, the portal was repainted.

In 1953, the bridge was posted for a maximum load of 8 tons and this same limit was recommended after a cursory inspection on October 7, 1969. After a detailed inspection on May 6, 1974, the posted maximum load was reduced to 2 tons. After a detailed reinspection on April 17, 1979, it was recommended that the bridge be closed due to disintegrating abutments. This was made a certainty in July when flooding severely damaged the abutments. There was such a public outcry, however, (due to the lack of access in the local area) that the commissioners reopened it and posted a "cross at your own risk" sign. The Leatherwood Station Bridge was finally closed in August of 1979.

The covered bridge is to be moved from its original site to Billie Creek Village, just outside of Rockville. This relocation effort has been approved by the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. A Memorandum of Agreement has been processed and signed by the Parke County Commissioners, the Indiana State Highway Commission, the Federal Highway Administration, the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Chairman of the Advisory Council. Indeed, this report is in accordance with Stipulation (2) of the Agreement. The relocation is to be undertaken and coordinated by Parke County, Incorporated.

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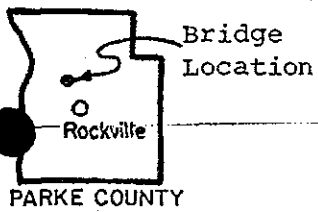
Parke County, Inc. is a private, non-profit organization that exists to promote tourism, recreation and industrial development within the county. Historically, Parke County, Inc., the County Commissioners, and the County Council have worked together to preserve the covered bridges. Both units have expended thousands of dollars in this effort beginning in 1957 and Parke County, Inc., has as one of its main goals, the dedication to preserve Parke County's Covered Bridges. Over the past several years Parke County, Inc., has expended thousands of dollars in various covered bridge repair, maintenance, and relocation efforts. This will be the fourth covered bridge relocation project that Parke County, Inc. has undertaken.

Billie Creek Village in Parke County, Indiana, is a re-creation of an Indiana cross-roads community as it might have appeared near the turn of the century. This Village celebrated its tenth anniversary this year and now boasts fifteen buildings plus two covered bridges. Located just east of Rockville on U.S. 36, the Village is situated on 75 acres along Billie Creek. It was in 1964 and 1965 that a few Parke County people began a study to find a way to make the county more interesting the year around. The Covered Bridge Festival, which attracts thousands annually, and the Maple Fair in February had offered proof that visitors enjoyed the scenery and friendliness they found in Parke County. There was also evidence that these visitors have tremendous interest in all phases of midwestern background history. It was decided to buy a suitable tract of land and create a village typical of some specific period of the past. In July of 1969, Parke County took a firm step backwards and began salvaging old buildings as a start for this turn of the century village. The land obtained had the meandering creek (shown on maps as Williams Creek, but nicknamed Billie Creek), an adjacent covered bridge and was in an accessible location. The site itself is of interest, lying between the original Pike's Peak Highway (later called Ocean to Ocean) and the same route's roadbed, U.S.36. Most of the buildings have been moved to this site and each is of special interest, both architecturally and for the function it served. Most of the buildings have artisans demonstrating some of the handcrafts and other activities that were part of community living 75 years ago. The farmstead was dedicated during 1976, but is even more complete now. A non-profit organization, Billie Creek Village, Incorporated, maintains the village and farmstead and would maintain the Leatherwood Station Bridge once it had been moved to the Village.

REFERENCES

- (1) Gould, George E. 1977. Indiana Covered Bridges Thru the Years. Indiana Covered Bridge Society, Inc. Indianapolis.
- (2) Comp, T. Allan and Donald Jackson. "Bridge Truss Types: A Guide to Dating and Identifying". American Association for State and Local History Technical Leaflet 95, History News, Vol. 32, No. 5, May, 1977.
- (3) Ketcham, Bryan E. 1949. Covered Bridges on the Byways of Indiana. Oxford Printing Co., Oxford, Ohio.
- (4) Correspondence received from George E. Gould on June 18, 1979 containing an amalgam of information supplied by Juliet Snowden, Bryan Ketcham and Mel Daviess.
- (5) Standard Atlas of Parke County, Indiana. 1905 (title page missing)
- (6) Records of the Parke County Commissioners, 1899. Vol. 17, p. 338.
- (7) Ibid. p. 339
- (8) Ibid. p. 427
- (9) Personal communication with Mr. Ralph Farlow in July, 1979. He and his wife live near the bridge.
- (10) Vlach, John M. 1972. "Daniels and Britton, Master Bridge Builders". Indiana Covered Bridge Society Newsletter. Vol. 9, No. 4 and Vol. 10, No. 1.
- (11) Allen, Richard S. 1970. Covered Bridges of the Middle West. The Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, Vermont.
- (12) Letter to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. written by William H. Brandenburg, Secretary of the Indiana Covered Bridge Society. February 27, 1978.

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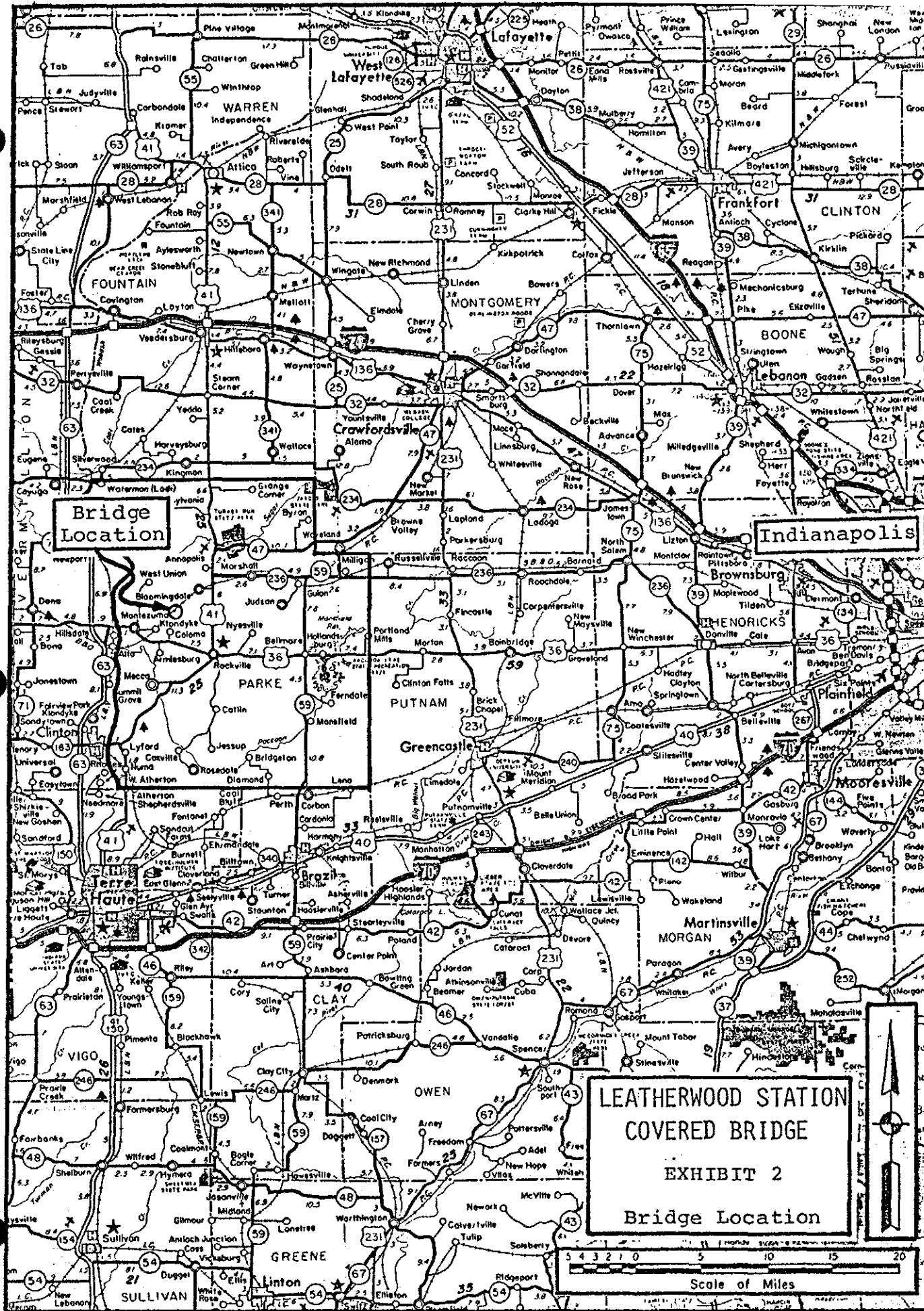


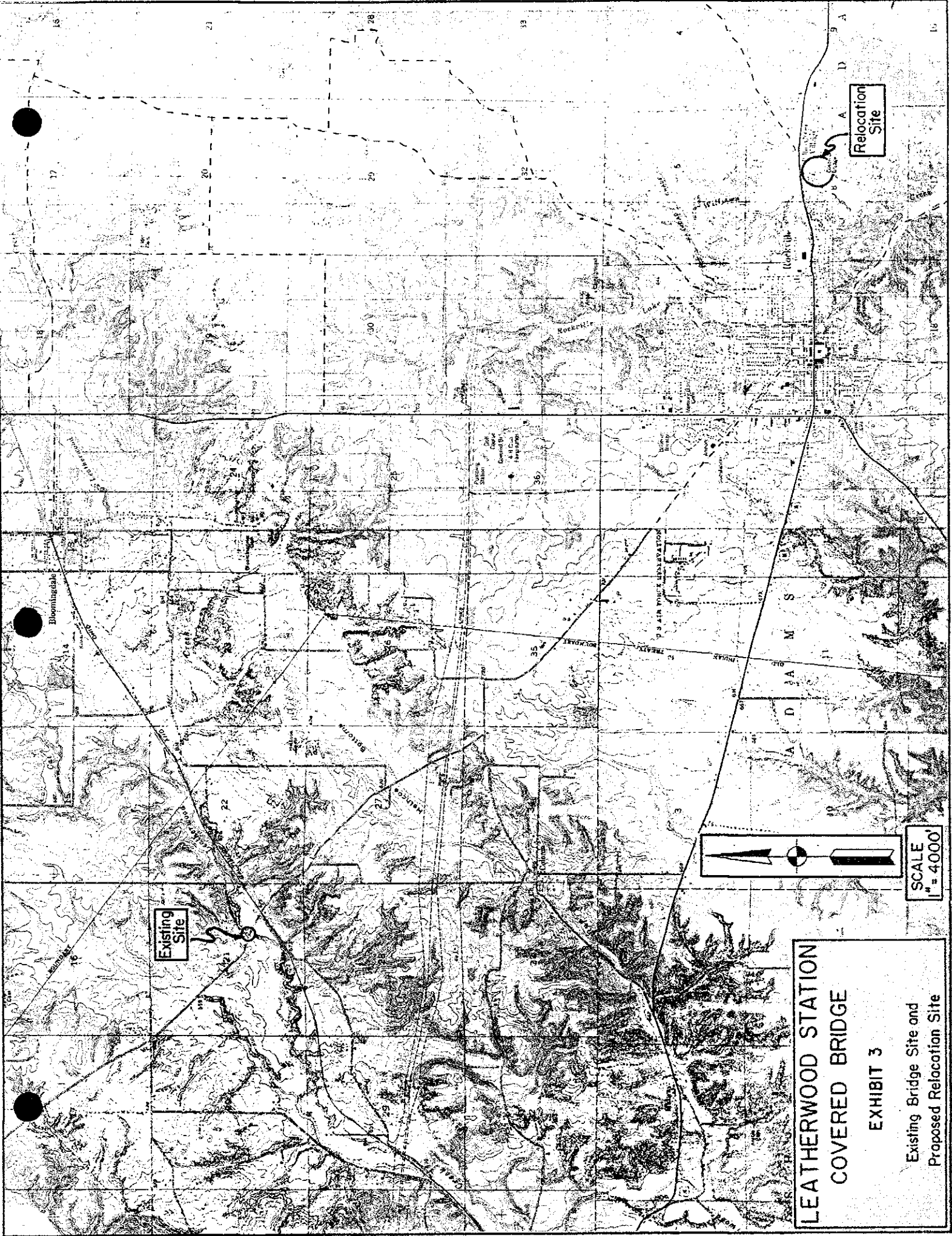
LEATHERWOOD STATION
COVERED BRIDGE

EXHIBIT 1

Bridge Location







LEATHERWOOD STATION
COVERED BRIDGE
EXHIBIT 3
Existing Bridge Site and
Proposed Relocation Site

SCALE
1" = 4000'



Relocation
Site

Existing
Site